



Universidad Pública de Navarra  
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FACULTAD DE CIENCIAS HUMANAS,  
SOCIALES Y DE LA EDUCACIÓN

GIZA, GIZARTE ETA HEZKUNTZA  
ZIENTZIEN FAKULTATEA

**Graduado o Graduada en Maestro en Educación Infantil**

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**Trabajo Fin de Grado**

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**PROMOTING PHONOLOGICAL  
AWARENESS IN YOUNG LEARNERS: A  
classroom proposal for 5-year-olds**

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**Enlace vídeo: <https://youtu.be/dhiW6gzJq3Q>**

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**Campo/Arloa: English**

**05, 2022**

## ABSTRACT

Teaching literacy with the help of phonological awareness methods, such as phonics, has become more prominent in schools' teaching methodologies for Early Childhood learners of English as a foreign language (EFL). On the contrary, a decade ago, pronunciation was not given the importance it has nowadays in classrooms when learning a second language (L2), and this has had a noticeable impact on students' ability to read and speak in English. This project focuses on developing phonological awareness towards one specific phoneme, the English glottal fricative /h/, in two different groups of 5-year-old students, taking into consideration some individual variables of great impact in second language learning. The project describes the intervention, the results obtained and also an analysis of the challenges that come when teaching it. The results show that it is possible to enhance and develop phonological awareness in young learners, regardless of their learning abilities and native languages. Furthermore, it proves that teachers can deliver these phonics lessons even when their command of English pronunciation is modest and that such interventions benefit both students and teachers.

## RESUMEN

La enseñanza de la lectoescritura con la ayuda de métodos de conciencia fonológica, como la fonética, ha cobrado mayor importancia en las metodologías de enseñanza de las escuelas para los alumnos de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL). Por el contrario, hace una década no se le daba a la pronunciación la importancia que tiene hoy en día en las aulas cuando se aprende una segunda lengua (L2), y esto ha tenido un impacto notable en la capacidad de los alumnos para leer y hablar en inglés. Este proyecto se centra en el desarrollo de la conciencia fonológica hacia un fonema concreto, la fricativa glótica inglesa /h/, en dos grupos diferentes de alumnos de 5 años, teniendo en cuenta algunas variables individuales de gran impacto en el aprendizaje de una segunda lengua. El proyecto describe la intervención, los resultados obtenidos y también un análisis de los retos que se presentan al enseñarla. Los resultados demuestran que es posible potenciar y desarrollar la conciencia fonológica en alumnos jóvenes, independientemente de sus capacidades de aprendizaje y de sus lenguas maternas. Además, se demuestra que los profesores pueden impartir estas lecciones de fonética incluso cuando su pronunciación no es de nivel nativo o casi, y que estas intervenciones benefician tanto a los alumnos como a los profesores.

*Palabras clave:* Fonética; Educación Infantil; pronunciación; inglés lengua extranjera; fonemas.

*Keywords:* Phonics; Early Childhood Education; pronunciation; EFL; phonemes.

# INDEX

INTRODUCCIÓN	4
1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	6
1. 1. TEACHING PRONUNCIATION TO VERY YOUNG LEARNERS	6
<b>1.1.1. What is phonological and phonemic awareness?</b>	6
<b>1.1.2. Phonological awareness and learning to read</b>	7
<b>1.1.3. Approaches to phonics teaching</b>	9
<b>1.1.4. Challenges when teaching phonics to EFL students</b>	12
1.2. BASIC CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT YOUNG LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN SCHOOL CONTEXTS	14
<b>1.2.1. Differences between language acquisition and language learning</b>	14
<b>1.2.2. Individual variables in SLL (Second Language Learning)</b>	16
2. PROPOSAL FOR DEVELOPING PHONEMIC AWARENESS IN THE CLASSROOM: A focus on the glottal fricative “h” /h/	19
2.1. Introduction	19
2.2. Objectives of the study	20
2.3. Individual variables	21
2.4. Didactic materials and resources	23
2.4.1. The use of songs	23
2.4.2. Picture-matching	24
2.4.3. Identifying sounds	24
2.4.4. Storytelling	25
2.4.5. Phonemic segmentation	25
2.5. The sequence of activities	26
2.5.1 SESSION 1	28
2.5.2 SESSION 2	29
2.5.3 SESSION 3	30
2.5.4 SESSION 4	31
2.5.5 SESSION 5	32
2.6. Associated reflection and conclusion/Analysis and discussion of the results	33
2.6.1 Project limitations	34
CONCLUSIONES GLOBALES	36
REFERENCES	38
APPENDIXES	40
<b>Appendix 1</b>	40
<b>Appendix 2</b>	40
<b>Appendix 3</b>	43

## INTRODUCCIÓN

La pronunciación es una de las habilidades comunicativas del inglés más complejas, tanto de aprender como de enseñar. Existen una gran variedad de métodos que han sido implementados en la enseñanza de la pronunciación con éxito a lo largo de los años, pero ninguno de estos enfoques se ha extendido en la enseñanza de L2 como método preferido por el profesorado. Debido a esta falta de acuerdo, nos encontraríamos con infinitas posibilidades de abarcar esta área de la enseñanza.

Este proyecto está centrado en el desarrollo de la conciencia fonológica mediante el trabajo de un fonema en concreto, la /h/. La conciencia fonológica es un término del que cada vez se habla más dentro de las aulas. Se ha demostrado que el desarrollo de la conciencia fonológica a una edad temprana contribuye a facilitar el aprendizaje de las habilidades lectoras, especialmente para estudiantes no nativos que aprenden inglés como segunda lengua. Además, la enseñanza del inglés en Educación Infantil cada vez se centra más en el aprendizaje de los fonemas y no de las letras como tal, debido a que un buen dominio de los fonemas más tarde contribuye a una mejor pronunciación.

La planificación de este trabajo se ha dividido en dos partes. El marco teórico es la base del proyecto, el concepto de conciencia fonológica y fonémica, así como su relación con el inicio de la lectura, además de una variedad de metodologías para la enseñanza de la fonética, y los retos que surgen para los profesores. También se exponen las consideraciones básicas sobre los jóvenes estudiantes de idiomas en contextos escolares, se discuten las diferencias entre la adquisición y el aprendizaje de idiomas, y las variables individuales en el aprendizaje de segundas lenguas. En la propuesta práctica se desarrollan las sesiones que se han llevado a cabo en la escuela, además de los contenidos y objetivos sobre los que se han diseñado estas actividades, una breve descripción del grupo escogido para la propuesta y una reflexión y análisis de los resultados obtenidos.

La propuesta se llevó a cabo en un colegio público durante un periodo de prácticas y se escogieron 8 alumnos de dos clases tras un mes de observación, en base a sus capacidades de aprendizaje, su idioma nativo y su pronunciación incorrecta del fonema /h/.

La elección del fonema fricativo glotal /h/, que corresponde a la grafía “h” en inglés, se justifica por varias razones. Los estudiantes no nativos, hispanohablantes, tienden a pronunciar la grafía “h” como si fuera el fonema fricativo velar /x/ del castellano, que se realiza a través de las grafías “j” y “g” en esta lengua. Además, el fonema /h/ se corresponde exclusivamente con la grafía “h” en inglés, lo cual facilita la introducción de la conciencia fonológica y su relación con las grafías con escolares muy jóvenes que están comenzando a familiarizarse con el alfabeto por primera vez. Trabajar este fonema

constituiría un punto de partida para ir avanzando con fonemas que tienen relaciones grafo-fonémicas más complejas, es decir, que no se corresponden con una única letra (algo muy frecuente en lengua inglesa). Finalmente, la dificultad articulatoria del sonido también es pequeña y, por tanto, resultará asequible para el alumnado evitando la frustración y la motivación que pueden acompañar la no consecución de objetivos.

De manera global, con este trabajo se pretende abordar la cuestión de la falta de importancia que se le da a la pronunciación a la hora de enseñar inglés como segunda lengua proponiendo una actividad muy concreta como ejemplo para desarrollar una conciencia fonológica entre los alumnos de 5 años. Se pretende mostrar que este tipo de intervención es factible y eficaz y que la intervención enfocada en el fonema escogido se podría extender a todos aquellos fonemas que presenten dificultades para el alumnado.

# 1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Pronunciation is a skill that does not have a specific methodology established when it comes to teaching it, especially in a second language like English for non-native speakers. Countless techniques and strategies have been used for years, but nothing has been declared a 'universal' way of teaching pronunciation.

The basis of this theoretical framework has been divided into two sub-sections, *teaching pronunciation to very young learners*, where the concept of phonological and phonemic awareness is explained, as well as their relation to beginning to read, a variety of methodologies for phonics teaching, and the challenges that arise for teachers. Regarding the other sub-segment, *basic considerations about young language learners in school contexts*, the differences between language acquisition and language learning are discussed, in addition to the individual variables in Second Language Learning.

## 1. 1. TEACHING PRONUNCIATION TO VERY YOUNG LEARNERS

### 1.1.1. What is phonological and phonemic awareness?

To begin with this project, the question of what phonemic and phonological awareness is must be answered. There has been plenty of research and studies that have attributed different definitions to these terms. Regarding this lack of agreement between researchers, Paulson (2004) affirms:

Stanovich noted in 1992 that little consensus in the terminology had been used when referring to various aspects of phonological awareness, and researchers have "argued intensively" about the meaning of the term and about the nature of the tasks used to measure it. He went on to say that this lack of consensus, concerning the terminology referring to the various aspects of phonological awareness as well as the tasks to measure it, has led to confusion (P.16).

Phoneme awareness is a deeper level of phonological awareness, in phoneme awareness, the "ability to isolate and manipulate individual sounds or phonemes is involved" (Schuele and Boudreau 2008, p.6). Concerning phonological awareness, Anthony & Francis (2005) state:

In summary, persuasive evidence now exists that phonological awareness is heterotopically continuous. That is, phonological awareness is a single, unified ability during the preschool and early elementary school years that manifests itself in different skills throughout a person's

development. Thus, there is consensus that phonological awareness refers to one's ability to recognize, discriminate, and manipulate the sounds in one's language, regardless of the size of the word unit that is the focus. (p.256)

Phonological awareness is an ability that students develop during the preschool and primary school years. Paulson (2004), states that phonological awareness has also been defined as phonological sensitivity and that "higher levels of sensitivity require more explicit analyses of smaller-sized phonological units (e.g., phonemes), and more primitive levels of phonological sensitivity require a more shallow level of analysis of larger sound units (e.g., syllables)" (p.17).

While phonological awareness tasks "require a child to analyse, make judgments about, or manipulate sounds in spoken words" (Schuele and Boudreau, 2008, p.6), phonemic awareness is the "ability to auditorily recognize and manipulate individual sounds in words" (Wasik, 2001, p.128). Accordingly, phonemic awareness is rather a subskill of phonological awareness, one that takes children more time and effort.

Thus, phonological awareness occurs before phoneme awareness and requires a more basic set of skills to be developed.

During the first years of learning, children acquire language mostly by hearing and imitating. This is the reason why these years are decisive for their development and their reading skills, and why it is so necessary to reinforce phonological awareness. Paulson (2004) states "Phonological awareness is an important aspect of early literacy that is related to reading success later in school." (p.14)

There is also a great deal of evidence that associates reading issues with "poor performance in tasks that demand a deeper form of phonological sensitivity--in particular, tasks that require the more explicit forms of phonemic segmentation" (Share & Stanovich, 1995, p.12). Children that young do not realize they are learning, they are not aware of the basis of language, and they do not have a previous language structure acquired that limits them. They are constantly reproducing the sounds they hear, which gives them a head start in acquiring pronunciation skills.

### **1.1.2. Phonological awareness and learning to read**

Phonological awareness in school contexts cannot be dissociated from the literacy process, that is, from the process of learning to read by mastering the letter-sound connections of the target language, usually referred to as grapho-phonemic rules. This project is mainly focused on promoting phonological awareness among 5-year-old students by working on one specific phoneme. Phonemes are "the smallest unit of speech" (Wasik, 2001, p.128), and the ones that form a word vary depending

on the context of the other letters. Compared to Spanish, a language with very univocal letter-sound relationships, English establishes very complex and sophisticated grapho-phonemic rules. Suffice it to provide a simple example here, when pronouncing the letter 'u', we do not make the same sound in the words *put* (/pʊt/) and *cut* (/kʌt/); the phonemes differ, even if the letter written is the same. Teaching phonological awareness is predominantly done by teaching phonics in English classrooms. Phonics is "a component of reading instruction that describes sound-symbol relationships in terms of spelling patterns" (Paulson, 2004, p.12).

As mentioned before, researchers have all come to the agreement that phonological awareness is a set of skills children acquire and master through their learning process. Therefore, what are those major skill areas? Chard & Dickson (1999) classified the activities from less to the most complex. At the bottom or the "less complex end of the continuum", are rhyming and alliteration. These authors declared that when children start demonstrating an appreciation for rhyme and alliteration, that is when they usually display their first signs of phonological awareness. Consequently, come skills associated with segmentation and blending.

Ultimately, the most complex activities are related to phoneme awareness. When children understand that "words are made up of individual sounds or phonemes and [present] the ability to manipulate these phonemes either by segmenting, blending, or changing individual phonemes within words to create new words" (Chard & Dickson, 1999), that is when they have achieved all the major skills of phonological awareness.

Rhyming and alliteration sensitivity have been proved to contribute to reading (Fernandez-Fein & Baker, 1997). MacLean et al. (1987) illustrated that when children start to recognize and reproduce rhymes, they show "clear examples of phonological skills" (p.256), because to recognize that two words sound the same, children have to understand first that the two words *share* a sound, and that sound is a fragment of "two monosyllabic words".

Alliteration is a "skill that requires the identification and production of words that begin with the same sound" (Paulson, 2004, p.11). For example, when children recognize that *hat* and *hen* share the first sound, /h/.

Both rhyming and alliteration are Individual Growth and Development Indicators (IGDI), along with rhyming, that children start to display at the beginning of their phonological development. IDGIs are "measures that can fill the gap by providing helpful information about children's growth toward outcomes" (Carta et al., 2005, p.3).



Segmentation, also acknowledged as *analysis*, is a more complex skill, and it takes children a longer period of time to achieve it. It requires “the analysis of speech and breaking it into individual words, syllables, or phonemes” (Paulson, 2004, p.12). It is the ability children exhibit, for example, when they recognize that a word, such as *hat*, can be broken into three phonemes /h/, /æ/, and /t/.

Blending is the opposite of segmentation. This skill requires children to recognize and say a word when the phonemes are being said individually and slowly. It “requires combining a sequence of isolated syllables or phonemes together to produce a word” (Paulson, 2004, p.11). For instance, when told /hhhhhh/, /ææææææ/, /ttttttttt/, the student is able to say *hat*.

Picture-naming is a skill Chard & Dickson (1999) did not interpret in their continuum of complexity, but it has been proven to be an Individual Growth and Development Indicator (IDGI) many researchers use when evaluating students’ phonological development and awareness, as well as one that has been utilized in this project. When children are presented with different pictures and images and can identify them and correctly say what they are, they show mastery of this skill.

Lastly, phoneme awareness. This is, as previously stated, the most complex sub-skill of phonological awareness. It is achieved when the child is conscious of the fact that “words are made up of individual sounds or phonemes and [has] the ability to manipulate these phonemes either by segmenting, blending, or changing individual phonemes within words to create new words” (Chard & Dickson, 1999).

### **1.1.3. Approaches to phonics teaching**

As mentioned above, phonics does not have a teaching method unanimously agreed upon by researchers as *preferred*, or more effective. There are countless useful methodologies teachers use to teach and develop students’ pronunciation in class.

Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu (2010), as well as many other researchers, have discussed that there are three main techniques for teaching pronunciation. These approaches are known for integrating modern and traditional methods together. They are called the intuitive-imitative approach, the analytic-linguistic approach, and the integrative approach.

One of the first authors to talk about these approaches was Celce-Murcia in her book published in 1996; where she discusses the intuitive-imitative and the analytic-linguistic approach.

An *intuitive-imitative* approach “depends on the learner's ability to listen to and imitate the rhythms and sounds of the target language without the intervention of any explicit information (Celce-

Murcia, 1996, p.2)”. In this approach, it is assumed that the learner's ability to imitate and listen to foreign language sounds and rhythms leads to the expansion of comfortable pronunciation frameworks without the intervention of individual explicit data (Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu, 2010). Different media like videos or websites are of use in this approach.

On the other hand, Celce-Murcia (1996) describes the *analytic-linguistic* approach as follows: “explicit intervening of pedagogy related to pronunciation is in focus. The students are delivered with explicit data on pronunciation enjoying articulatory descriptions, phonetic alphabet, and vocal charts” (Shabani & Ghasemian, 2017, p.4). This one uses information and aids such as phonetic alphabets, pronunciation descriptions, vocal tract maps, contrast information and other tools to complement listening, imitation and production. (Celce-Murcia, 1996). These two approaches are not thought to be opposites, they complement each other and are both often used simultaneously.

In the integrated approach, pronunciation is seen as an integral part of communication. Regarding this method, Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu, (2010) state:

Pronunciation is regarded as an integral component of communication, rather than an isolated drill and practice sub-skill. Pronunciation is practised within meaningful task-based activities. Learners use pronunciation–focused listening activities to facilitate the learning of pronunciation. There is more focus on the suprasegmentals of stress, rhythm and intonation as practised in extended discourse beyond the phoneme and word level. Pronunciation is taught to meet the learners’ particular needs (P.984).

As previously mentioned, these three approaches have been regarded as the principal contemporary methods of learning pronunciation by countless specialists. Nonetheless, this has been a subject of research since the teaching of language was an occurrence, and Celce-Murcia (1996) was one of the researchers to illustrate these several methods of teaching pronunciation. Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu (2010) designed a table, as shown below, where they compiled all these methodologies. (See *Table 1*)

**Table 1.** *Teaching pronunciation methodologies*

<b>Years</b>	<b>Approach</b>	<b>Definition</b>
The late 1800s and early 1900s	<i>Direct Method</i>	Teachers provided students with a model for native-like speech. By listening and then imitating the modeller, students improved their

		pronunciation.
(The 1940s and 1950s)	<i>Audio lingual method</i>	Pronunciation was taught explicitly from the start. Learners imitated or repeated after their teacher or a recording model. Teachers used a visual transcription system or articulation chart. Technique: minimal pair drill.
(The 1960s)	<i>Cognitive Approach</i>	This de-emphasized pronunciation in favour of grammar and vocabulary because (a) it was assumed that native-like pronunciation was an unrealistic objective and could not be achieved and (b) time would be better spent on teaching more learnable items, such as grammatical structures and words
(1970s)	<i>Silent Way</i>	The learners focused on the sound system without having to learn a phonetic alphabet or explicit linguistic information. Attention was on the accuracy of sounds and structure of the target language from the very beginning. Tools: sound-colour chart, the Fidel charts, word charts, and colour rods.
	<i>Community Language Learning</i>	The pronunciation syllabus was primarily student-initiated and designed. Students decided what they wanted to practise and used the teacher as a resource. The approach was intuitive and imitative.
The mid-late 1970s (1980s-today)	<i>Communicative Approach</i>	The ultimate goal was communication. Teaching pronunciation was urgent and intelligible pronunciation was seen as necessary in oral

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		communication. The techniques used to teach pronunciation were: listening and imitating, phonetic training, minimal pair drills, contextualised minimal pairs, visual aids, tongue twisters, developmental approximation drills, the practice of vowel shifts and stress shifts related by affixation, reading aloud/recitation, recordings of learners' production
20th century	<i>Grammar-translation and reading-based approaches</i>	Oral communication was not the primary goal of language instruction. Therefore, little attention was given to speaking, and almost none to pronunciation
More recent	<i>Total Physical Response</i>	Students would begin to speak when they were ready. They were expected to make errors in the initial stage and teachers were tolerant of them.
	<i>Natural Approach</i>	The initial focus on listening without pressure to speak allowed the learners to internalise the target sound system.

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Note. Adapted from "Approaches to Teaching Pronunciation," from Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu (2010), *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 2(2), 983–989. (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2010.03.138>)

#### 1.1.4. Challenges when teaching phonics to EFL students

A lot of challenges arise concerning teaching EFL students, especially at an early age. Education has evolved and adapted to the globalization of society, and classrooms have become profoundly diverse. Thus, teachers have to overcome many challenges to try and provide the best learning experience for their students. Teaching EFL pronunciation seems to be particularly gruelling for non-native educators.

In the investigation presented by Gan (2013), the principal conclusion was that student teachers often take for granted the level of difficulty involved in applying theory to practice. Students showed a clear intention to implement task-based language teaching in their classrooms, but they ultimately realized that the stress and pressure made it unfathomable to fit their "ideal pedagogical

techniques” into the class and at the same time encompass all of the contents and meet the established evaluation deadlines.

This study also regarded the language barrier teachers and student teachers face when teaching EFL and how this can affect their confidence, therefore impacting the way they approach teaching and express themselves to the students. “It is thus suggested that teacher candidates should be provided with opportunities to improve their written and spoken English throughout their teacher training programme [..]” (p.105).

Accordingly, these above-mentioned challenges arise even before educators commence their teaching experience. Taking this into consideration, we focus now on the challenges related to phonics. Developing children’s ability to read can be done using many diverse methods, as mentioned before, which means there is no consensus on when and how to introduce young learners to first-time reading assignments (Saleh, 2022).

Not only that but some factors may increase the difficulty and challenges to teaching phonics, such as family’s backgrounds and socioeconomic status; families with higher levels tend to introduce their children to literacy earlier and are more easily able to access a wider variety of resources. Reyhner (2008) classified this as *high* and *low* literacy households. Children that come from high literacy households enter schools having already had some contact with literature, as they are constantly being read to and have access to many books. “An estimated 5% can already read when they enter school” (Reyhner, 2008). In this case, the author affirms that independently of the teaching method that is used, students do not usually have a problem learning to read and achieve that skill properly.

As for children that come from low literacy households, “it is argued that standard phonics approaches can be unsuccessful for these students”, because they are not exposed to much reading at home and thus have more limited vocabularies in comparison, “as much as one-half the vocabularies of students from high literacy homes” (Reyhner, 2008). Differences in dialects and native languages can also be challenges for teachers when teaching phonics to these students.

Another issue Reyhner (2008) comments on is brain development, putting countries with higher results on international tests, like Finland, as an example. These countries do not start teaching reading until children’s brain development is more advanced.

Smith (2011) stresses on the fact that when teaching phonics “one size does not fit all, and intended users need to carefully match the resources with their intended student needs, and indeed,

their ability to pay” (p.7). This is another challenge for teachers, as they always need to adapt their lessons keeping in mind their students and their capabilities, both financially and in terms of learning. This author discusses the teacher’s role when teaching EFL, especially phonics, emphasizing on the uniqueness of the position. Smith (2011) declares that “the phonemic competence levels of teachers be addressed before pedagogical aspects are explored. Without good teacher models of phonological awareness to begin with, the value of any phonics pedagogical training will surely be lost” (p.13). It is crucial that teachers are well prepared to teach phonics given the difficulty and lack of agreement in establishing a single effective method, but the reality is that more often than not, non-native teachers have not received the correct and adequate education to properly teach phonics, due to the fact that this approach was probably not how teachers learned English when they were students.

Regarding this issue and the matter of which approach to use, these author states that “programmes need to develop in light of the specific needs of a community” (p.12), and that, for example, for EFL students, methods developed for first language students may not succeed. Also, L1 and L2 must be given the same importance and priority and parents should be totally involved in their children’s learning process, but as shown by evidence, the reality is that “providing equal priority in multilingual situations is often fraught with problems” (p.13). He also stresses that true learning can take place only when L1 and L2 support one another.

In conclusion, Smith (2011) argues that teacher input must be taken into consideration, as well as provide educators with chances to assess how best phonics education can be planned, prepared, and presented to meet the specific demands of their own communities.

## 1.2. BASIC CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT YOUNG LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN SCHOOL CONTEXTS

### 1.2.1. Differences between language acquisition and language learning

Krashen (1982) acknowledged five hypotheses about Second Language Acquisition. The first one he denominated *the acquisition-learning distinction*. He stated that this one was “perhaps the most fundamental” of the hypotheses. This distinction indicates that a second language competence can be acquired through different and independent processes.

Language *acquisition* is a “subconscious process; language acquirers are not usually aware of the fact that they are acquiring language but are only aware of the fact that they are using the language for communication” (p.10). This is also how children develop their first language, and it is

always subconscious. When we acquire this competence, we are not aware of the *rules* that a language has, we just know it is the correct way to do it, and we *feel* when we commit the errors, we have a sense of *correctness*, but this does not mean we are aware of the grammatical rules that form a language. For better understanding, “in non-technical language, acquisition is “picking-up” a language” (p.10).

On the contrary, Krashen (1982) stated that when we refer to learning, we address the *consciousness* that comes with acquiring that competence. We are aware of the rules that form a language and have the ability to talk about them. “In non-technical terms, learning is “knowing about” a language, known to most people as “grammar”, or “rules” (p.10).

The acquisition-learning distinction also states that while some researchers and theorists have declared that children acquire and adults only learn, this hypothesis defends that adults can also acquire, that they do not lose that ability when they grow and that even though it “does not mean that adults will always be able to achieve native-like levels in a second language, it does mean that adults can access the same natural “language acquisition device” that children use” (Krashen, 1982, p.10).

Table 2, elaborated by Carroll (2021), differentiates the principal characteristics between language learning and acquisition.

**Table 2.** *Differences between language acquisition and learning*

Language <i>acquisition</i>	Language <i>learning</i>
The purpose is communication.	It is initially not driven by a
It is a subconscious process.	communicative purpose.
The learner is unaware of grammatical rules.	It is a result of direct instruction in the rules of language.
It works with a feel for what is and what is not correct.	It is not an age-appropriate activity for very young learners.
It needs a source of natural	Students have conscious knowledge of

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communication.	the new language and can talk about
The emphasis is on the content of the	that knowledge.
communication and not on the form.	It is instruction based.

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Note. Adapted from "Language Acquisition and Language Learning" from Carroll, L. (2021), *Language Education: Teaching English in India*, 59.

Alongside the development of the field of second language acquisition, different approaches have opted for other terms to refer to the acquisition-learning dichotomy and have provided their own perspectives on these concepts. Thus, these terms have also been referred to as *procedural or implicit knowledge* and *declarative or explicit knowledge*.

In theory, the distinction between procedural and declarative knowledge can be established primarily by the awareness of what is being learnt and the intentionality with which it is being taught (Ellis, 2009). In explicit knowledge, the awareness is present, whereas in implicit knowledge it is not. As stated by Ellis (2009), a language learner's linguistic competency is defined as including both implicit and explicit knowledge.

Children *acquire* language before learning it, mainly because it is what they are able to do at that age. It has also been agreed that acquisition is more permanent than learning, which is why it is so important for young learners to start acquiring as early as possible because it will reflect positively on their future learning process.

### 1.2.2. Individual variables in SLL (Second Language Learning)

Teaching children (or adults) does not have an assured or established outcome, and neither does the process consistently follow a pattern. Today's classrooms stand out for their diversity, and the individual variables in Second Language Learning play a key role in learning outcomes. Regarding attitude, Oller (1977) states:

There is probably no topic in sociolinguistics that is more elusive, abstract, and subjective in nature than the topic of attitudes and their effect on learning a second language. Therefore, it is important that the methods of investigation applied to such a subject be as sharp, impartial, and systematic as is possible (p.172).



As mentioned above, the subject of individual variables is too broad to establish what makes the difference when it comes to acquiring the competencies of SLL. Having said that, researchers have agreed upon several factors that influence SLL, such as aptitude, style, strategies and motivation. It is fair to say these elements always influence the learning process.

Regarding *aptitude*, John B. Carroll conducted several studies. When he started researching second language training methods, in the late 1950s, he realized that there were very few techniques that had already been studied. Carroll (1964) ran various tests and concluded that there were “at least four main components of foreign language aptitude: phonetic coding ability, grammatical sensitivity, rote memory for foreign language materials, and inductive language learning ability”.

**Table 3.** Carroll’s four-component model of aptitude

Component name	Name and function
Phonemic coding ability	Capacity to code unfamiliar sound so that it can be retained over more than a few seconds and subsequently retrieved or recognized.
Grammatical sensitivity	Capacity to identify the grammatical functions that words fulfil in sentences.
Inductive language learning ability	Capacity to extract syntactic and morphological patterns from a given corpus of language material and to extrapolate from such patterns to create new sentences.
Associative memory	Capacity to form associative bonds in memory between L1 and L2 vocabulary items.

*Note.* From “18 Individual Differences in Second Language Learning” from Dörnyei & Skehan (2003), *The handbook of second language acquisition*, 589.

As for *cognitive and learning styles*, Oxford and Anderson (1995) argue that learning styles have six interrelated aspects: *cognitive*; they involve favoured or habitual mental functioning patterns, often referred to as "cognitive styles", *executive*; it is associated with the extent to which the person seeks “order, organization, and closure” in his or her learning processes, *affective*; it reflects the sets of attitudes, beliefs, and values that determine what a person will focus on in a learning setting, *social*; regarding the preferred level of interaction with other people while learning, *physiological*; involving at least some of the person's anatomically-based sensory and perceptual tendencies, *behavioural*; in

terms of how purposefully someone seeks out situations that are favourable to their learning preferences.

Learning styles have many dimensions, or components, related to cross-cultural contexts. For Oxford and Anderson (1995), while there are many style dimensions that learners can have, the most significant for SLL are: the global and analytic, as well as the field-dependent and field-independent dimensions: which are all related to the cognitive aspect, feeling and thinking, and impulsive and reflective styles; both related to the affective and cognitive features, the intuitive-random and concrete-sequential styles, together with closure-oriented and open styles are associated with both cognitive and executive aspects, the extroverted and introverted styles can be both social and affective, and the visual, auditory and hands-on styles; all related to the physiological feature.

Concerning *learning strategies*, these are methods that one uses consciously when learning a language, and while it is worth mentioning the terms *learning styles* and *learning strategies* may sound similar, the strategies stand out for being “specific behaviours or techniques that students use, often consciously, to improve their own progress in internalising, storing, retrieving and using the target language” (Oxford, 1990a, b, cited in Oxford & Anderson, 1995).

Oxford (1990) recognized six distinct types of L2 learning techniques: *cognitive strategies* entail the modification or transformation of learning materials, such as summarising, repetition, note-taking or using images; *memory-related strategies*, in which abbreviations, phonetic parallels, pictures, and key phrases assist learners in associating one L2 item or concept with another but do not require a deep comprehension; *metacognitive strategies*, where more complex techniques are used to analyse, monitor, evaluate, plan, and organise one's own learning process; *compensatory strategies*, like guessing from context, paraphrasing and gestures and pause words, which can assist compensating for a lack of information; *social strategies*, concerning interpersonal behaviours targeted at strengthening the learner's L2 communication and performance, like initiating interaction with native speakers or asking questions and for help; and *affective strategies*, which consist on taking charge of the emotional settings and experiences that determine one's personal involvement in learning, such as being able to manage one's emotions, identifying anxiety levels, or talking about feelings.

*Motivation* is one of the affective variables that influence SLL, along with anxiety, self-efficacy, and many more. Gardner (1975) agrees that there is a significant amount of research literature, as well as professional observations, which indicate that “a student's motivation to acquire a second language can be as important a determinant of success in acquiring a second language as is his

language aptitude” (p. 11). Motivation is related to the interest students take in learning a language. Regarding this term, Dörnyei and Skehan (2003) state that motivation “is responsible for why people decide to do something, *how long* they are willing to sustain the activity, and *how hard* they are going to pursue it” (p. 614).

Deci and Ryan (1985) proposed a model that distinguishes between two types of motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic. *Intrinsic motivation* is centred on the “innate, organismic needs for competence and self-determination” (p. 32). Thus, when learning is a goal within itself, students are intrinsically motivated. Ehrman et al (2003) declare that intrinsic motivation “comes from within the individual and is related to the individual’s identity and sense of well-being” (p. 20). As for *extrinsic motivation*, it comes from outside of the person. Students are extrinsically motivated when “learning is done for the sake of rewards (such as grades or praise) that are not inherently associated with the learning itself, that is, when learning or performing well becomes necessary to earning those rewards” (Ehrman et al, 2003, p.20). These authors also mention that while many studies corroborate intrinsic motivation is more directly related to language learning achievement than extrinsic motivation, a student’s overall motivation is typically a combination of both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation.

In conclusion, SLL does not follow an established pattern for all students. Many factors contribute to the process, all of which must be taken into consideration in the learning process of an individual, as well as when assessing the results of this process.

## 2. PROPOSAL FOR DEVELOPING PHONEMIC AWARENESS IN THE CLASSROOM: A focus on the glottal fricative “h” /h/

### 2.1. Introduction

This project was created on the basis of achieving the development of phonological awareness among young learners (N=8) during their last year of preschool education. The project was carried out at the Public School of Azpilagaña, a neighbourhood in Pamplona, Navarra. This school is part of the British Council, which means they have half of their lessons in English. There are students from pre-school to sixth grade and each grade is divided in two groups. Four students were chosen from

each class of the third and last year of preschool education. The participants were 3 boys and 5 girls, chosen on the basis of their learning capabilities, language abilities, and native language.

There were several limitations to be considered when designing the tasks for this activity, which mainly impacted the amount of time available for it. This project was carried out during a small period of teaching practice, for about two months, all while maintaining the student's scheduled lessons and units as a priority. This meant all activities had to be carefully planned and condensed to fit a very small portion of the children's schedule.

A private, comfortable environment was also prioritised for the students, as it was considered better for them not to be with their peers for them to be at ease and focused on the activities. The psychomotricity room of the school was chosen, with the main drawback of it being shared with other grades and teachers, plus adapting to the lesson plan that was already established by the tutors. This requirement further impacted time availability, reducing the number of lessons per week.

Five lessons were prepared for the project, with the use of diverse methods such as storytelling, picture-matching, singing and speaking. The aim was to analyse the student's phonological awareness in different situations, both in very guided activities and less controlled situations, like free speaking conversations. The intention was to design practical, entertaining, varied activities that would motivate the students and show their capabilities and progress.

My role during the sessions was to act as a guide. I explained the activities, or introduced them to the games, but always giving them the space and time needed for them to express themselves and show truly their abilities and what they could aspire to achieve. I never set a key point to be reached, nor did I force them when I saw that they had not yet acquired the degree of awareness necessary for this activity.

## 2.2. Objectives of the study

The purpose of this project is to assess whether phonological awareness in L2 can be promoted in young learners through a series of didactic activities using a wide variety of resources. In addition, it is intended to check which subskills of phonological awareness have been acquired by the participants. All of this will be focused on the acquisition of phoneme /h/.

Therefore, with this proposal, we expect our participants to:

- Identify words that start with the target phoneme.

- Recognize words when they are blended sound by sound.
- Match sounds with their corresponding image.
- Segment words into their individual sounds.
- Realize when a phoneme is not correctly pronounced.

A broader objective connected to the contents of the subject of English as a foreign language in primary school in Navarra would be that the student will be introduced to the oral use of other languages of the curriculum to communicate in classroom activities and show interest and enjoyment in participating in these communicative exchanges.

Accordingly, the following research questions guided our project:

- Will the students be able to identify words that start with phoneme /h/?
- Will the students recognize words starting with the phoneme /h/ when they are blended sound for sound?
- Will the students be able to match sounds with their corresponding image?
- Will the students segment words that start with the phoneme /h/ into their individual sounds?
- Will the students realize when the phoneme /h/ is not being accented correctly?

It is expected that, by the end of the proposal, students will have developed at least the less complex sub-skills of phonological awareness. It is also assumed that at least one participant will show signs of advanced development of phonological awareness. Due to the limitations present in conducting the study, it is presumed that students with fewer learning difficulties will acquire the skills faster, but it is also intended to stimulate the motivation and attitude of all students towards second language learning, especially those with learning difficulties.

### 2.3. Individual variables

As mentioned above, the students chosen for the project were elected due to a variety of reasons, such as their native languages, learning capabilities, attitude and motivation towards learning and language abilities. The decision to choose them, in particular, was done upon some observation of their attitude in class, in group activities and in individual tasks. Upon closer inspection, there was

one clear conclusion: they all shared one common factor and all of them made the same pronunciation error, they all pronounced a very hard /h/, similar to the Spanish pronunciation of the letter J.

*Student A:* Student A is from a Bulgarian-speaking household, but also has a good level of both Spanish and English. This student does not present any learning difficulties, except for an emotional stuttering, which does not influence the study. She has not yet fully acquired sufficient reading skills. Her /h/ pronunciation was strong, similar to the Spanish J. In regards to motivation and attitude towards learning, student A was always willing to play and learn, and had a positive attitude towards the lessons, but would become silent if she committed a mistake.

*Student B:* Student B is from a Pakistani-speaking household, as well as a good level of both Spanish and English for his age. This student does not present any learning difficulties and presents high learning abilities. He has already acquired sufficient reading skills. Student B has a very distinguished pronunciation of some phonemes English due to his native tongue. His /h/ pronunciation was particularly strong. Student B's attitude towards learning was always positive, as was his motivation.

*Student C:* Student C comes from a Romanian-speaking household and has a good level of Spanish and English. He presents high language learning abilities, and advanced reading skills for his age and shows no learning difficulties. Student C's /h/ pronunciation was very strong, similar to the Spanish J. This student was always very motivated, but also got easily distracted and wanted to finish to prove that he could do every task assigned.

*Student D:* Student D comes from a Spanish-speaking household, more specifically from the Dominican Republic. This student does present more trouble with English as a second language and has learning difficulties, directly related to a lack of motivation and a passive attitude towards learning in class, especially whenever she makes a mistake. Nevertheless, during the lessons, Student C had a positive and active attitude towards the tasks and was always motivated to try. Her /h/ pronunciation was very strong, similar to the Spanish /x/ (letters "j" and "g").

*Student E:* Student E comes from a Spanish-speaking household, from Guatemala. This student shows clear learning difficulties and a lack of knowledge of phonics and letters, both in Spanish and English. Her attitude towards learning is negative and passive and she gets easily distracted. Motivation was not present during the lessons at first but was there in the end. Her /h/ pronunciation was very hard, similar to the Spanish J.

*Student F:* Student F is from Mali, as is his father. His mother is from Guinea. Student F used to present learning difficulties due to the fact that he suffered from hearing loss until he was 4. His tutors quickly realized how advanced his reading skills were, as well as his learning abilities. His pronunciation when speaking both English and Spanish was particularly strong, but his level is good in both languages. As for his attitude and motivation, student F always showed a positive and active attitude towards the lessons but also got easily distracted.

*Student G:* Student G comes from a Moldovan-speaking household. This student presents clear learning difficulties, as well as a fear of making mistakes which affects her attitude towards learning. She is not motivated and only shows a positive attitude towards the activities she knows she will achieve successfully. She does not want to try and do new tasks due to her fear of failure. Her /h/ pronunciation is similar to the Spanish J.

*Student H:* Student H is from Spain and a Spanish-speaking household, which shows clearly in her English pronunciation, the phoneme /h/ is very strong. She is not very motivated towards learning, but she was very participative during the lessons. Her attitude is similar to Student C's, she wanted the tasks to finish but also wanted to do them all correctly. She presents no learning difficulties and has acquired some reading skills.

## 2.4. Didactic materials and resources

To carry out this proposal, 5 different materials were used: (1) a song; (2) matching cards; (3) I spy game; (4) a story and (5) a table mat. To ensure that the students worked on the chosen phoneme, most of the materials were designed using the same group of words; hat, hop, hen, hug, heart, hot, hands, and house.

### 2.4.1. The use of songs

The first material used for the development of this proposal was a song. The intention was to use one song that they were already familiar with and that contained the phoneme that was going to be worked, so the Jolly Phonics /h/ song was chosen. The students had already worked previously on the project with Jolly Phonics, so they knew the melody and the words, and they liked it because they got to hop and dance. The lyrics of the song are as follows:

*Tune:* Apples and Bananas

I like to hop, hop, hop, up and down.

I like to hop, hop, hop, all around.

I like to hop, hop, hop, up and down.

/h/-/h/-/h/-/h/-/h/!

The action students use for the phoneme is holding their hands to their mouths and saying h, h, h, as if they are out of breath. The use of the gesture is very convenient and was used in every lesson because they associate it with the phoneme, and this helps them realize when they need to pronounce it less accented (See [appendix 1](#)).

#### 2.4.2. Picture-matching

The second material created for this project was a set of cards (see [appendix 2](#)). This resource was thought to be used as a memory game. Each card has a picture on one side and the word written on the other side. The words used for the cards are the ones, as mentioned above, that were worked on all lessons; hat, hop, hot, hug, heart, hen, hands and house.

Each card was printed twice, so that it could be used as a memory game, to match the picture to the word, but it was also used in different ways, as it will be explained in the sequence of activities. This material aimed to see the student's pronunciation, as well as reading skills, phonemic segmentation and picture naming abilities.

#### 2.4.3. Identifying sounds

The next resource was inspired by the game 'I spy'. This material is a page made of different pictures and images, some start with the phoneme /h/ but not all of them. Apart from the /h/-sound words previously mentioned, other words related to phonemes that were being worked in class were added.

Figure 1. I spy /h/ game sheet





The goal for the use of this material was to see if the students were able to identify only the words that started with the phoneme that was being worked on during the sessions, and not the rest of the words.

#### 2.4.4. Storytelling

Including a story was fundamental since beginning to plan and design the materials and sessions for the proposal. Storytelling is crucial for preschool students because not only being exposed to it can help them in the development of skills, but it is also the best way to introduce them to literacy.

The fourth material designed for the project was a story. It was difficult to find a story that contained all the keywords we were going to work with, so the best option was to create a short, entertaining story that would appeal to them and not bore them. The story (see [appendix 3](#)) was also constructed keeping in mind the unit that was being worked on in class, the castles. This way, the story centred on a hero who lived in a castle.

Throughout the story, new words were introduced, such as *helmet*, *hero* and *horse*. The plot was very simple, focusing on easily introducing new and known words:

“Henry the Hero lives in a Huge castle on top of a Hill!

He wears a helmet on his Head and He Has Blonde Hair

He Has a Horse named Heidi, and He loves Her!

Today it is very Hot in His House

And He is very Hungry, He wants a Hamburger!

But He is so Happy!”

The aim was not on elaborating a complicated story, but to get them to learn the story and be able to tell it themselves, to see how they pronounced the keywords during a free conversation time, with activities that were not so guided, and see their progress in developing phonological awareness.


#### 2.4.5. Phonemic segmentation

The last material designed for the proposal was a table roll and read mat. This material was prepared for the last session of the project, as it was the most complicated of them all. It is a table with the

keywords used throughout the sessions and 6 images with all the sides of a dice. The students had to roll the dice and read the words in the order that they were written.

The purpose of the material was not so much centred on the participants' reading skills, but to see if they had acquired the skills of phonetic segmentation and blending.

Figure 2. Roll and Read table mat

	HOP	HAT	HEN	HUG	HOT
	HAT	HOT	HOP	HEN	HUG
	HOT	HEN	HAND	HUG	HOP
	HEN	HOT	HAT	HOP	HAND
	HUG	HOP	HEN	HAND	HAT
	HAND	HUG	HAT	HOT	HEN

## 2.5. The sequence of activities

As previously mentioned, 5 sessions were designed in order to carry out the proposal. A few weeks before starting to implement the designed activities, a detailed observation of the students in both classes was carried out. This was done to see the pronunciation and phonological awareness level of each student.

The most important factors that were kept in mind when choosing the group of students were to assemble a group of students with different learning abilities, different native languages, and that all of them had a significantly accentuated pronunciation when saying the "h". The idea was to see, when the results were analysed and discussed, if that phonological awareness could be promoted in the students, regardless of their L1 languages and learning abilities. The observation was mostly done during the morning assemblies and the phonics lessons, but also whenever the students conversed in English.

At the start of the day, students sang a song called *Let's Shake Hands* which goes as follows:

Hello hello, let's shake hands.

Hello hello, let's shake hands.

Hello hello, let's shake hands.

It's English time again.

Everyone jump three times.

One, two, three.

Everyone clap three times.

One, two, three.

Everyone stomp three times.

One, two, three.

Everybody jump up high, yeah!

Hello, hello let's all bow.

Hello, hello let's all bow.

Hello, hello let's all bow.

It's English time again.

Everyone spin three times.

One, two, three.

Everyone blink three times.

One, two, three.

Everyone nod three times.

One, two, three.

Everybody jump up high, yeah!

Hello, hello let's all hug.

Hello, hello let's all hug.

Hello, hello let's all hug.

It's English time again.

Now let's sit down

(Maple Leaf Learning, 2015, 1m45s)

Through this song, the pronunciation of words like *hello*, *hug* and *hands* could be observed, which helped in the decision to choose the participants. Also, during the morning assembly attendance was

recorded, naming each student. They answered by saying *here*, which also helped in the decision-making process to create the group.

The observation process also took place during the phonics sessions, especially in one that was mainly focused on the glottal fricative “h” /h/. Thanks to the elements previously discussed, plus the conversations that students had during their free play moments, 8 students were chosen to carry out the five sessions.

As previously stated, each session was conducted with both groups, the same tasks were executed, and the same resources were used. The following is an explanation of what was done in each session and the results obtained from every participant. It is worth mentioning each session was conducted in the psychomotricity class, except from session 4, due to schedule reasons.

### 2.5.1 SESSION 1

In the first session, after gathering the participants and going to the classroom where the session was to take place, the starting task was to greet each other and ask how they were feeling. As expected in children that age, each of the 8 participants answered with *happy*.

The next activity was to sing the Jolly Phonics song. First, the music was played in the background, to help them get into the rhythm. Then, they sang without the music and the result was recorded, in order to compare their progress throughout the sessions. After singing the songs, the participants sat down and played the memory game using the matching cards. Both identical sets of cards were laid down on the floor, one set with the images showing and the other with the words.

The following table shows the pronunciation results, classified as very, slightly and not accented, very accented meaning a very hard pronunciation, whereas not accented means a correct pronunciation of the glottal fricative /h/.

**Table 4.**

Results from the first session

	<b>Greeting</b>	<b>Song</b>	<b>Cards</b>
Participant A	Very accented	Not accented	Slightly accented
Participant B	Slightly accented	Very accented	Slightly accented
Participant C	Slightly accented	Very accented	Slightly accented

Participant D	Not accented	Very accented	Very accented
Participant E	Not accented	Slightly accented	Slightly accented
Participant F	Very accented	Very accented	Slightly accented
Participant G	Very accented	Very accented	Very accented
Participant H	Slightly accented	Very accented	Very accented

## 2.5.2 SESSION 2

The second session was quite similar to the first session in regards to the tasks carried out. The participants started greeting each other. After that, the memory game was played again, but this time in a slightly more complex way, not only they had to match the picture to the word, but also try to match the two same written words, without images.

The new material implemented in this session was the story. The participants were introduced to the tale and asked to repeat some of the new and already known keywords, to observe their pronunciation when using repetition, in comparison to their own speech production. The students also asked to sing the song again, and even though the result was not recorded this time, as it was neither necessary nor planned, it was noted down due to the changes presented.

**Table 5.**

Results from the second session

	<b>Greeting</b>	<b>Cards</b>	<b>Cards without image</b>	<b>Story</b>	<b>Song</b>
Participant A	Very accented	Slightly accented	Very accented	Slightly accented	Very accented
Participant B	Slightly accented	Very accented	Slightly accented	Not accented	Slightly accented
Participant C	Slightly accented	Very accented	Very accented	Not accented	Not accented
Participant D	Not accented	Very accented	Slightly accented	Not accented	Not accented
Participant E	Not accented	Very accented	Slightly accented	Slightly accented	Slightly accented

Participant F	Very accented	Very accented	Slightly accented	Slightly accented	Very accented
Participant G	Slightly accented	Very accented	Very accented	Slightly accented	Slightly accented
Participant H	Slightly accented	Slightly accented	Very accented	Not accented	Very accented

### 2.5.3 SESSION 3

During the third session, a new material was introduced to the participants. The same procedure was followed; greeting, cards, although this time not without the images, just as the normal memory game, the story and the I spy sheet, in which the students played saying “I spy with my little eye... a *hat*”.

**Table 6.**

Results from the third session

	<b>Greeting</b>	<b>Cards</b>	<b>Story</b>	<b>I spy</b>	<b>Song</b>
Participant A	Very accented	Slightly accented	Slightly accented	Not accented	Very accented
Participant B	Not accented	Slightly accented	Not accented	Slightly accented	Slightly accented
Participant C	Not accented	Slightly accented	Not accented	Slightly accented	Not accented
Participant D	Not accented	Very accented	Not accented	Slightly accented	Not accented
Participant E	Not accented	Very accented	Slightly accented	Slightly accented	Slightly accented
Participant F	Very accented	Very accented	Slightly accented	Not accented	Very accented
Participant G	Slightly accented	Very accented	Slightly accented	Slightly accented	Slightly accented
Participant H	Slightly accented	Slightly accented	Not accented	Not accented	Very accented

#### 2.5.4 SESSION 4

The fourth session was the most complex one to date. Due to schedule reasons, the usual classroom used for the sessions could not be used, so it was carried out in the classroom with the other peers. For this reason, neither the song nor the story were included.

In this session, the roll and read mat was introduced to the participants. This didactic material is the one with the highest level of difficulty of all of them because it encompasses reading skills, as well as pronunciation skills. Taking advantage of the fact that they had to stay in the classroom, this session was done individually and not with the 4 participants of each class at the same time. Each student was called and started with the greeting, and after playing the memory and I spy game, the roll and read table mat was next. Students had to roll the dice and read the line that corresponded to them.

**Table 7.**

Results from the fourth session

	<b>Greeting</b>	<b>Cards</b>	<b>I spy</b>	<b>Roll and Read Mat</b>
Participant A	Slightly accented	Slightly accented	Not accented-imitation	Slightly accented
Participant B	Not accented	Not accented	Not accented	Not accented
Participant C	Not accented	Slightly accented	Slightly accented	Very accented/Slightly accented after imitation
Participant D	Not accented	Not accented	Slightly accented	Slightly accented
Participant E	Not accented	Not accented	Slightly accented-imitation	Slightly accented
Participant F	Slightly accented	Slightly accented	Not accented	Not accented
Participant G	Not accented	Slightly accented-imitation	Slightly accented-imitation	Slightly accented
Participant H	Slightly accented	Slightly accented	Not accented	Slightly accented-imitation

## 2.5.5 SESSION 5

The fifth and last session was the most complete as it encompassed all the materials created for the proposal. This session aimed to see the progress, if there was one, in each of the activities the participants were already familiar with.

**Table 8.**

Results from the fifth session

	<b>Greeting</b>	<b>Cards</b>	<b>Cards without picture</b>	<b>Story</b>	<b>I spy</b>	<b>Song</b>
Participant A	Not accented	Slightly accented	Not accented	Slightly accented-imitation	Not accented	Not accented-being told
Participant B	Not accented	Slightly accented	Not accented	Not accented	Not accented	Slightly accented
Participant C	Slightly accented	Not accented	Not accented	Slightly accented	Slightly accented	Not accented
Participant D	Not accented	Not accented	Slightly accented-imitation	Not accented	Not accented	Not accented
Participant E	Not accented	Slightly accented	Slightly accented-imitation	Slightly accented	Slightly accented	Slightly accented
Participant F	Not accented	Very accented	Very accented	Not accented-imitation	Not accented	Very accented
Participant G	Not accented	Very accented	Slightly accented	Not accented-imitation	Not accented	Slightly accented
Participant H	Not accented	Not accented	Not accented	Not accented-imitation	Not accented	Not accented-being told



## 2.6. Associated reflection and conclusion/Analysis and discussion of the results

After conducting all of the sessions and analysing the results, one conclusion stands out: almost all of them present an awareness when the activities are very guided. All the participants' results show an unaccented pronunciation of the phoneme /h/ when the activities are directed. On the contrary, the results in the activities that require spontaneous production vary between very accented and slightly accented. As stated above and related to the concepts of declarative and procedural knowledge, we have observed that, when students are aware they are being taught something, their results improve because they are able to focus on the target (the pronunciation of /h/ in our case). However, integrating this learning into procedural knowledge, that is automatizing the learned aspects, seems to require time and effort.

As previously mentioned, phonological awareness is a set of skills that children develop and refine throughout their learning process. The following reflection of the results has been made based on these skills and the degree of accentuation shown by the participants, taking into account the level of support received in the sessions.

Alliteration is the first skill children acquire in this process, and, as observed in the *I spy* activity, all of the participants had acquired it prior to the intervention. Only participants G and E showed difficulties, but it seemed that these difficulties were related to not knowing what the word was, not to associating that all words began with the same letter. Phonemic segmentation is a more complex sub-skill. Participants A, B, D, F and H all showed segmentation abilities when asked during the memory card game, but only with the 3-letter words, such as *hat*, *hop*, *hen* and *hot*. Regarding picture naming, participants G and E were the only students who showed difficulties in remembering the names of the objects shown on the cards. As for blending, all of the participants, when hearing the 3-letter keywords slowly, phoneme by phoneme, were able to say which word it was. All of the students showed mastery of several, or even all, subskills of phonological awareness.

The results show that by the end of the project, all of the participants greeted each other by saying *hello* in a not accented manner, except for participant C. Other activities, such as telling words from the story, or playing the *I spy* sheet also show many improvements in the pronunciation of the participants.

With the memory card and roll and read activities, the results seemed to hinge on the participants' reading skills. On the one hand, the students who had acquired reading skills prior to the study showed better pronunciation when they were asked to read the word (f.i. "hen"), that is, without the picture. However, when the picture was shown to these students they tended to say it directly and transfer from the L1 happened. That is, in that case, they did not think about the pronunciation that they had learnt and practised and simply said the word as they saw the picture. On the other hand, the students who still struggled with reading, performed better when the word (without picture) was shown to them. When they were only shown the word, they read it out loud phoneme by phoneme, trying to work it out, which helped them with the pronunciation. Since these students had not developed sufficient literacy skills yet, they were guided more by imitation and focused on the pronunciation that they already knew of the word.

Lastly, observing both recordings of the song, an overall improvement can be noticed. There are participants that, due to the excitement, present more L1 transfer, and a stronger non-native accent. Nevertheless, a change is clearly shown. It is worth mentioning that, in the last session, participant H stated that it was "wrong" to say *hat* with a strong accent and that it should be softer, as they had learned in class. This is proof of the development, to some extent, of phonological awareness. In addition, most participants became aware, when the gesture of the Jolly phonics song was performed, that the pronunciation had to be less stressed, and on all occasions, the performance of the gesture led to improvements in pronunciation.

### 2.6.1 Project limitations

Although an improvement in the development of phonological awareness can be observed through the results, it is worth mentioning that the work has been limited by certain aspects.

First of all, there were some logistic limitations related to time and physical space. As already mentioned, the project was carried out during a teaching practice period that lasted two months. The students' schedule was to be maintained, as well as the lessons and units, planned prior to the organization of the project. This is the main reason why the project was designed in a very concrete way and focusing only on a single phoneme. The fact that the activities were designed to be entertaining for the participants was also a constraint in terms of space. These activities required a separate classroom, which could not be used for all the sessions, or every day, which meant that the sessions had to be held on more skipped days. Perhaps if this project had been focused in a different way and two sessions per week had been established, the results would have been different,

especially for the students with more learning difficulties, since they required more guidance and motivation.

In specific cases, such as those of participants E and G, lack of motivation seemed to play an important role in why the results did not show a more noticeable improvement. These participants became mentally blocked when they saw that the activities required some complexity, and this probably affected the results. On days when motivation and attitude towards the sessions were positive, the improvement was noticeable.

## CONCLUSIONES GLOBALES

La enseñanza del inglés como segunda lengua es un área del que todavía queda mucho por investigar. La conciencia fonológica es un concepto relativamente moderno en la enseñanza. Años atrás, el aprendizaje del inglés se realizaba basado principalmente en el texto escrito, en este momento, sin embargo, los textos orales han cobrado mayor protagonismo.

El papel del docente es crucial para conseguir un desarrollo óptimo de la conciencia fonológica en los estudiantes jóvenes. La etapa de la Educación Infantil es clave para el aprendizaje de las lenguas, debido a la tendencia que tienen los alumnos en los primeros años de aprender a través de la imitación. Los niños están constantemente expuestos a nueva información, en la etapa infantil la capacidad de retención de información fonológica es muy elevada. Posteriormente, el adulto necesita aprender de forma explícita y no es capaz de adquirir con la naturalidad de un niño o niña. Recurriendo de nuevo a la dicotomía de Krashen (1982), el aprendizaje prevalece frente a la adquisición. Es importante aprovechar la etapa temprana de adquisición del lenguaje en estudiantes jóvenes, ya que influye positivamente en su futuro proceso de aprendizaje, y se pueden acercar más a un nivel de dominio del idioma similar al de los nativos.

En el proceso de enseñanza del inglés como segunda lengua debe tenerse en cuenta también las variables individuales de cada alumno. Cada persona es distinta, y existen unas variables que pueden influenciar tanto positiva como negativamente en el proceso de aprendizaje y en los resultados de los estudiantes. Es importante que los docentes siempre consideren las necesidades específicas de cada alumno y se atengan a ellas a la hora de planificar y diseñar actividades, sesiones y unidades didácticas en las aulas y en la enseñanza.

Hay que tener en cuenta que este trabajo ha sido diseñado centrándose exclusivamente en un solo fonema. En inglés hay 44 fonemas, y la /h/ es uno de los fonemas menos complicados de pronunciar correctamente, aunque es más complicado interiorizar esta pronunciación correcta debido a la fuerte tendencia a asimilarlo con el fonema /x/ del castellano. También es un fonema con una relación directa con la grafía "h" sin apenas excepciones. Otros fonemas, sin duda, presentarán retos más complejos. Como continuación de este proyecto, habría que desarrollar y adaptar materiales existentes para el resto de los fonemas y comprobar si los resultados siguen siendo positivos, si fuese necesaria una modificación de la metodología y los materiales utilizados, o si simplemente, con fonemas más complejos, habría que esperar a que los alumnos adquirieran un nivel más desarrollado de la segunda lengua o enfocar la conciencia fonológica con otras estrategias.

Este proyecto demuestra que es posible potenciar y desarrollar la conciencia fonológica en alumnos jóvenes, independientemente de sus capacidades de aprendizaje y sus idiomas nativos. Frecuentemente se subestima a los alumnos de la etapa de infantil, abusando en el nivel de sencillez de las actividades. Los resultados de este proyecto demuestran que estos alumnos son capaces de aprender y desarrollar su nivel de inglés a una temprana edad si se enfocan y adaptan los materiales a sus capacidades de aprendizaje.

Finalmente, cabe destacar que con este trabajo se demuestra que los docentes pueden impartir estas lecciones de fonética aun cuando su pronunciación no es igual o similar al nivel nativo. Asimismo, centrarse en la enseñanza de la fonética y la pronunciación es beneficioso para los docentes, ya que también pueden aprender y practicar a través de la enseñanza a los alumnos y pueden conseguir una mejora de la pronunciación, como ha sido el caso de este proyecto.

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## APPENDIXES

### Appendix 1

JOLLY PHONICS /h/ SONG

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p1ASoANhBSc>

#### PHONEME /H/

*Tune:* Apples and Bananas

I like to hop, hop, hop, up and down.

I like to hop, hop, hop, all around.

I like to hop, hop, hop, up and down.

/h/-/h/-/h/-/h/-/h/!

**Action:** Hold your palm in front of mouth. Say h, h, h, as if you are out of breath from hopping.

### Appendix 2

FLASHCARDS /h/

**HOP**

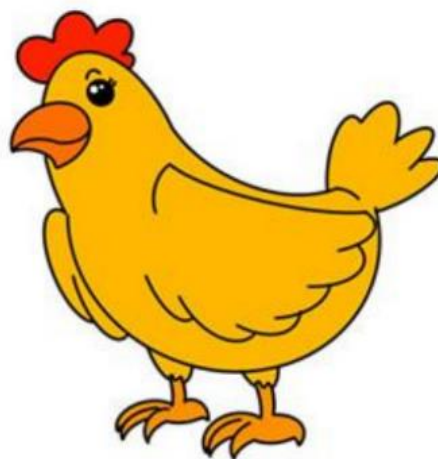




**HAT**



**HEN**



**HEART**



**HOT**



**HUG**



**HOUSE**



**HAND**

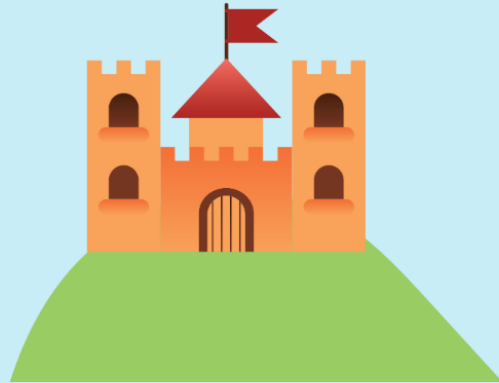


### **Appendix 3**

HENRY THE HERO STORY /h/



HENRY THE  
HERO LIVES IN  
A HUGE CASTLE  
ON TOP OF A  
HILL!



HE WEARS A  
HELMET ON HIS  
HEAD AND HE  
HAS BLONDE  
HAIR



